

# Maharlika

## PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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### Staying Relevant

How does Gary Valenciano stay relevant 23 years after he hit the concert stage and created monster hits?

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### Pinay X-Men

Philippine-born Mei Melancon is "a little disappointed" that, despite her two months of work on "X-Men: The Last Stand," she appears only for a few seconds in the movie.

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## NMI declares Friendship Week with Philippines

In recognition of the Filipino community's contribution to the socio-economic development of the Commonwealth, acting Gov. Timothy P. Villagomez signed a proclamation declaring June 12-19 as the CNMI-Philippines Friendship Week.

The Philippines will mark the 108th anniversary of its independence on June 12 and the birthday of its national hero, Jose P. Rizal, on June 19.

Speaking before Philippine consular officials and representatives who were present at the proclamation signing

ceremony, Villagomez noted the Philippines and the Northern Marianas' shared history, similar cultures and languages, and long-standing economic relationship.

"For these reasons we join together today in a strong spirit of friendship, reaffirm-

ing our mutual commitment to continued good relations, good will, trade, and commerce. The Philippine-CNMI friendship is a lasting asset anchored on a foundation of shared values and common interests. Through this proclamation we pledge our

**NMI Page 2**



Philippine Consul General Wilfredo Maximo, left, is joined by Saipan Mayor Juan N. Tudela, acting Gov. Timothy Villagomez, and Attorney General Matthew Gregory at the conference room of the Governor's Office during yesterday's proclamation signing declaring June 12-19 as CNMI-Philippine Friendship Week.

### Beltran nailed on rebellion

By LUIGIE A. DEL PUERTO AND TARRA V. QUISMUNDO  
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Three months into Anakpawis Representative Crispin Beltran's protested detention, the Makati Regional Trial Court has upheld his indictment for the nonbailable offense of rebellion.

Makati RTC Branch 146 Judge Encarnacion Jaja Moya yesterday issued a two-paragraph order finding probable cause against the militant party-list lawmaker and his co-accused, 1st Lieutenant Lawrence San Juan.

The two men are among the 48 accused of involvement in an alleged Left-Right conspiracy to topple the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. The plot was the cited reason for Ms Arroyo's declaration of a weeklong state of national emergency starting on Feb. 24.

Moya scheduled Beltran's arraignment on the afternoon of June 8.

"After examining the records of this case, the court finds probable cause to believe that accused [Beltran and San Juan] committed the crime charged. Let a commitment order be issued," she said.

The order's second and last paragraph indicated that a motion earlier filed by San Juan, which asked that the case be quashed, had been submitted for resolution.

Moya is the second judge to handle the rebellion case. Earlier, Judge Jenny Lind Delorino said she was voluntarily inhibiting herself from it.

**BELTRAN Page 2**

### US military finds model for beating terror in RP

By AUDREY McAVOY  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

HONOLULU (AP)—When the commander of U.S. Special Forces in the Philippines talks about battles won in the war on terror, he does not list enemies killed and targets destroyed.

Instead, U.S. Army Col. James Linder recounts jobs created and schools built.

"We just changed the dynamics of a very small community from one in which only a few years ago, Abu Sayyaf was coming down from the hilltop with weapons on their back and recruiting the schoolchildren, to one in which they can't come

there anymore," Linder said.

Since 2002, U.S. Army Rangers and Navy SEALs have been training and equipping Philippine troops to oust al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf terrorists from Mindanao, a predominantly Muslim and largely poor part of the Southeast Asian nation. The militaries have used a combination of combat offensives and development projects—with a heavy emphasis on the latter—to isolate the terrorists and win over local populations.

Their successes in villages such as the one Linder described contrast sharply with the U.S.-

**US Page 2**

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# PINOYNEWS

## UN honors slain Filipino peacekeeper

By **VERONICA UY**  
INQ7.NET

The United Nations feted on Wednesday (New York time), along with 123 other fallen international peacekeepers, Army Staff Sergeant Antonio Batomalaque, who was killed in action in Haiti last year, according to an e-mailed statement to media by the Philippine Mission to the UN.

The Philippine Mission said Secretary General Kofi Annan, in solemn ceremonies commemorating the International Day of UN Peacekeepers at the

UN Headquarters, paid tribute to Batomalaque and his peers from 46 countries that died in the line of duty.

Ambassador Lauro Baja Jr., Permanent Representative to the UN, received from Undersecretary General for Peacekeeping Jean Marie Guehenno the Dag Hammarskjold Medal in the Service of Peace for Batomalaque's family, according to the statement.

"Today, we remember Sergeant Batomalaque and the other peacekeepers who have made the supreme sacrifice in support of our quest for world peace," Baja

said following the ceremonies. "We also pay tribute to Filipino Blue Helmets, both past and present that have brought honor to our country and our people."

A member of the elite Scout Rangers, Batomalaque became the first combat casualty for the Philippines in a UN operation after he was shot and killed by gunmen who attacked UN peacekeepers in the volatile slum district of Cite Soleil in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince on April 14, 2005.

"By all accounts, Sergeant Batomalaque died a hero," Baja said,

citing accounts that the slain Filipino peacekeeper was shot and killed while providing cover for a ranking United States Army officer who was also serving with the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

"His gallant action saved the life of the American officer and he was cited posthumously by the US Army for that," Baja said.

The 13 other Filipino military and police personnel of the UN peacekeeping operations died as a result of accidents or illnesses.

The Philippines has a contingent of 560 military and police

personnel serving in UN peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan, Burundi, Cote D'Ivoire, Haiti, Kosovo, Liberia, Sudan, and Timor Leste, making the Philippines the 24th largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions and the largest in Southeast Asia.

"The medals we bestow today on our fallen comrades can do little to replace their presence, their good deeds, their knowledge and bonhomie, the love they showered on family and friends," Annan said during the ceremonies.

"But they do place on record

our everlasting gratitude for the contributions these UN heroes made to our global mission of peace," Annan said.

"Our fallen colleagues went out into the world with the conviction that

their service could make a difference between war and peace, poverty, security, oppression, and freedom," he said.

"They showed in their work and in their lives that human conflict is inevitable, that poverty can be defeated, and that the promise of peace and tolerance exists among all peoples," the UN chief said.

### NMI

FROM PAGE 1

continued friendship and renew our commitment to mutual understanding," Villagomez said.

He endeared himself to the predominantly Filipino crowd by beginning his speech with a

greeting in Tagalog, the Philippines' national language.

The Northern Marianas is second home to nearly 20,000 Filipinos and Filipino-Americans.

Philippine Consul General Wilfredo Maximo said the Filipino community had scheduled a series of events in observance

of the CNMI-Philippines Friendship Week.

The activities will begin tonight with a graduation ceremony for Filipino workers who have completed livelihood courses sponsored by the Philippines' Overseas Workers Welfare Administration. Certificates of ap-

preciation will also be presented to the instructors and other individuals who have supported the program. The event will be held at the Fiesta Resort and Spa.

OWWA Saipan will also conduct a free health screening for Filipino workers on tomorrow, June 4, from 9am to 12nn

at the ground floor of the Nauru Building in Susupe.

On Sunday, June 11, 2006, the Philippine Consulate will lead a flag-raising ceremony at the Nauru Building. A community breakfast will follow immediately. In addition, Filipino organizations and several local businesses

will take part in Pistang Pinoy (Filipino-style fiesta) at the civic center in Susupe.

Local dignitaries will join Philippine government officials and community leaders in a vin d'honneur at the Fiesta Resort on Monday, June 12, 2006. (*Agnes E. Donato*)

### BELTRAN

FROM PAGE 1

Beltran was arrested as he was leaving his house in Bulacan province on Feb. 25. He was taken to Camp Crame national police headquarters and shown an arrest warrant dated Oct. 7, 1985.

He is being held at the Philippine Heart Center in Quezon City, where he is undergoing treatment for hypertension and a heart condition.

San Juan, who took part in the July 2003 Oakwood mutiny, escaped from his custodians in Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City, along with three other rebel soldiers on Jan. 17, and was recaptured on Feb. 21.

He is detained in a separate cell at the Intelligence Service Group compound in Fort Bonifacio, isolated from the other co-accused.

### 'Serious errors'

Beltran's lawyer, Romeo Capu-

long, said his client would appeal the order.

"I think the judge committed serious errors in finding probable cause ... It will be a gross miscarriage of justice if that kind of evidence [presented by the prosecution] were made the basis [of the order]," Capulong said by phone.

Moya's order was in response to Beltran's motion seeking judicial determination of probable cause.

The Department of Justice

(DoJ) had earlier haled Beltran to court based on witness statements saying he was present at a Feb. 20 meeting with San Juan and members of the New People's Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, in a farm house in Padre Garcia town, Batangas province.

### Discussion lacking

Padre Garcia is the same town where San Juan was recaptured.

But Beltran said in his motion that the DoJ case was too weak to be brought to trial because prosecutors had no evidence to prove their claim.

Capulong yesterday said Judge Moya's order lacked

a discussion on how it was arrived at.

"It is the duty of the court to resolve the fundamental issues we raised in asking for judicial determination of probable cause," he said, adding:

"We presented incontrovertible evidence including the attendance sheet [of the House of Representatives], which showed that Beltran was in Congress on the same day he was supposed to be at that meeting.

"And we also have footage from the security camera in Congress showing that he was there."

Capulong also said Beltran's name was not mentioned in the purported minutes of the meet-

ing and the operation plan of the Left-Right conspiracy, which were supposedly retrieved from a flash disk that authorities had confiscated from San Juan.

Philippine National Police Director Marcelo Ele Jr., whose office helped prepare the rebellion charges, said Moya's order was a validation of PNP efforts to build a case against the two men.

"We did our best to investigate, and the police are confident we have a very good and strong case," Ele said.

"That is as we have been telling the public—that we have a good case against not only Beltran but also the rest of the respondents," he said.

### US

FROM PAGE 1

led effort in Iraq or Afghanistan, where terror attacks only seem to increase. Now, senior U.S. military leaders say their work in the Philippines may offer lessons for how the U.S. operates in the Middle East.

On Basilan island, where U.S. troops started operating four years ago, improved security has allowed the Philippine military to shrink its presence from 15 battalions to two, said Maj. Gen. David Fridovich, the commander of U.S. Special Forces in the Pacific.

Fridovich said military operations are only 15 percent of what needs to be done. The rest is humanitarian, like Army engineers helping rebuild schools and military doctors giving residents shots. U.S. aid workers have helped build bridges and roads.

"We think there is a model here that's worth showcasing. There's another way of do-

ing business," Fridovich told reporters at the Pacific Area Special Operations Conference in Honolulu recently.

Of course, circumstances in the Philippines are far different from the Middle East. Disparate cultures, history and geography would prevent any Philippine solution from being applied directly to either Iraq or Afghanistan.

Also, the U.S. and Philippine militaries cannot take credit for all of Abu Sayyaf's failures. The group has marginalized itself by offending local populations with the use of tactics such as beheadings, rape and torture.

But Linder, speaking on the sidelines of an anti-terror conference in Hawaii, said his interactions with people on the island of Jolo showed the troops were making a difference.

He recalled a visibly emotional woman who ran up to him because she wanted to show her gratitude for the sewing machine that has allowed her to earn a living. And the village leader

who vowed to quit fighting for Abu Sayyaf and instead take up arms alongside Filipino soldiers against his former allies.

Rohan Gunaratna, head of terrorism research at the Singapore-based Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, said the U.S. has had "tremendous success" on Basilan.

"The Americans did not take the shortcut in Basilan. They took the long road—that's working with civilians. Their priority was to build bridges with the Muslim public rather than hunt the terrorists," Gunaratna said.

Iraq only became so violent because U.S. commanders focused too much energy on killing enemies when they should have done more to meet the basic needs of Iraqis, he said.

"The terrorists are also competing for the hearts and the minds of the people," Gunaratna said. "If you are able to do a better job, the terrorists are marginalized. No one will support the terrorists."

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**LABOR FRONT****Employers barred from hiring alien workers**By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**  
REPORTER**Q: How does an alien worker know that a certain employer is barred from hiring guest workers in the CNMI?****A:** The Department of Labor secretary or his designee has a Barred List containing the names of all employers who are prohibited from hiring nonresident workers. Under the Alien Labor Rules and Regulations, the Labor secretary shall make the Barred List available to the public. Labor will deny issuance of a Labor and Immigration Identification System card to an employer whose name appears on the Barred List.

□ □ □

**Q: What are the bases of issuing such Barred List?****A:** The Barred List is based on the findings of the Labor administrative hearing officers or the Labor secretary, when deciding an appeal, that the employer has violated or breached the Nonresident Workers Act, as amended, Minimum Wage and Hour Act, as amended, or the terms of any employment-related document filed with the Division of Labor.

□ □ □

**Q: What should a barred employer do in order to erase his, her or the company's name from the Barred List?****A:** An employer in the Barred List may petition the Labor secretary not more than once every six months for review of whether the employer's name should remain on the List. According to the Alien Labor Rules and Regulations, the employer has the burden to demonstrate by proof beyond a reasonable doubt that remedial efforts have been implemented to correct the cause of the reason for being placed on the Barred List and that the employer will otherwise follow all laws and regulations regarding the employment of alien workers. However, Labor will not entertain a petition from an employer named on the List as a result of a final order of the Labor hearing office or a court.Submit questions on labor issues to *Saipan Tribune* via e-mail at [editor@saipantribune.com](mailto:editor@saipantribune.com), or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133 or 135. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the *Saipan Tribune's* office on the second floor of the CIC Centre on Beach Road, Garapan.**Peso nears 53 to \$1**By **DORIS C. DURLAO**  
INQUIRER

The peso Thursday nearly touched the key barrier of 53 to the dollar as jittery global investors shied away from emerging markets.

Ahead of the Monetary Board's monthly rate-setting meeting later in the day, the peso fell to its weakest level in five months, hitting 52.98 to the dollar before closing at 52.87.

On Wednesday the peso closed at 52.86 to the greenback, its lowest level since early January.

"Commercial requirements are escalating and inflows from OFWs [overseas Filipino workers] have abated," said a currency trader at a big commercial bank. "With the unchanged interest rate scenario [at the Monetary Board], the market will continue testing 53 to one [dollar]."

Currency traders also said the financial markets were concerned about further interest rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve, given higher-than-expected inflation rate in the world's largest economy.

Further interest rate increases in the US would also make peso-denominated assets less

attractive, especially since differentials between local rates based on benchmark Treasury bills and rates on comparative offshore debt papers have turned negative.

The United States has raised policy rates 16 times since mid-2004.

Over the last three weeks, the peso has given up most of its gains this year, reflecting weakening currency markets in the region.

Currency traders said the central bank, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, which was a net buyer of dollars in March and early April, was unloading dollars on the spot market to stem the peso's fall.

On Thursday, the BSP was said to be selling dollars at intra-day highs, especially when information on some oil companies' demand for dollars came out.

On the interest rates scenario, currency traders said the BSP's reluctance to follow the US Fed's monetary tightening would exert pressure on the peso in the coming days.

"It will make the peso less and less attractive," one of them said.

**US awards P26M to Filipino anti-terror tipsters**By **NIKKO DIZON**  
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

The U.S. government yesterday hailed two Filipinos for standing up to terrorism, and handed each of them a reward of P13 million in cash for helping the authorities catch an alleged terrorist implicated in the bombing of a ferry last year and a plot to attack the American embassy.

"They deserve the award they get today. They deserve our thanks and gratitude," US Ambassador Kristie Kenney said in a speech during a brief rewarding ceremony at the embassy's ballroom.

Kenney added: "They are ordinary people who live ordinary lives and had the bravery and courage to stand up to terrorism in this country."

It was information from the two tipsters that led to the arrest of Hilarion del Rosario Santos III, also known as "Ahmed Islam Santos," in Zamboanga City last October. Santos was the alleged head of the Rajah Solaiman Movement, a group of Christian converts to Islam that has been closely associated with al-Qaeda-linked militants.

The two informants, who are both from Zamboanga City, made a brief appearance to claim their reward -- several bundles of thousand-peso bills placed in two heavy-duty attaché cases.

The informants did not speak

**William Lamb, right, the US Embassy's regional security officer, hands a suitcase of Philippine money worth US\$ 500,000 dollars to two heavily-masked Filipino informers during ceremony Wednesday May 31, 2006 in Manila, Philippines.**

to the media and their identities were concealed by masks. Each wore dark shades, identical blue-and-brown bull caps, light blue barong tagalog shirts and dark pants.

The attaché cases were handed to them by two US Embassy personnel.

Apparently, the cases were heavy as one of the tipsters, whose gait and build appeared to be that of a woman, had to be helped by one of the Americans.

They immediately walked

out of hall as US and Philippine security officials applauded.

For the tipsters' security and to protect their privacy, Kenney merely described them as "ordinary citizens" and declined to give further information about them or the kind of protection being given to the two.

The tipsters' prize comes from the US State Department's "Rewards for Justice" program, which provides cash for information leading to the arrest of terrorists involved in attacks on Americans.

Kenney said at a news conference that the amount of the reward is determined by "experts in Washington."

"They evaluate what sort of information is relayed and the importance of the terrorist," she added.

Also present at the ceremony was Ricardo Blancaflor of the National Security Council who told reporters that the RSM remains a threat even after Santos's arrest. He said the group continues to plan attacks but he did not elaborate.

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# Filipino held hostage in Somalia dies

**MANILA, Philippines (AP)**—One of 20 Filipino seamen held hostage in Somalia for nine weeks has died in captivity, his colleague told relatives Friday, as the crewmen's families appealed for government action to secure their release.

The men were seized by Somali pirates after their oil tanker, the United Arab Emir-

ates-registered MT LIN1, offloaded its cargo at a southern Somali port on March 29, the Philippine Foreign Affairs Department said.

Spokesman Gilbert Asuque said the department could not immediately confirm the reported death of one of the hostages, but said the government was trying to contact the ship's own-

ers, who have been negotiating with the hostage takers.

The owners were not identified.

One of the captives spoke with a relative in the Philippines by satellite phone, and in portions aired over Radio DZMM and ABS-CBN TV, he said one of the crewmen had died accidentally.

The hostage takers did not want the deceased man identified and the crewman gave no other details.

Wives of the crewmen appealed to the Philippine government for assistance.

Carmen Narciso, wife of chief engineer Perfecto Narciso, said Thursday that the gunmen were feeding their

captives only once a day because food was scarce.

In a statement, the Foreign Affairs Department said it realizes "the need of the ship owners to have every available time and option to resolve this dispute with the Somali group." It also warned Filipino seafarers to avoid Somali waters or trading with Somali ports "in view

of the difficult security situation in that country."

Piracy in Somalia rose sharply last year, with the number of reported incidents at 35, compared with two in 2004, according to the International Maritime Bureau. The bandits target both passenger and cargo vessels for ransom or loot.

## Governor hurt, two aides killed in blast

**MANILA, Philippines (AP)**—A Philippine provincial governor was seriously hurt and his bodyguard and driver were killed in an explosion late Thursday that police said may have been caused by a bomb.

Batangas Gov. Armand Sanchez was on his way out of the provincial capital in Batangas city, 110 kilometers (70 miles) south of Manila, when an explosion rocked his Hummer van,

killing his police bodyguard and civilian driver, regional police director Chief Superintendent Prospero Noble said.

Sanchez's lawyer, Ferdinand Topacio, said the governor was pushed out of the vehicle by his bodyguard after smoke was seen coming from the front. The car exploded shortly after, followed by a secondary blast.

"The governor rolled out of

the vehicle, but the two men were trapped inside the car and died," Topacio told Manila radio DZMM. Sanchez is out of danger in a hospital, but suffered second-degree burns, he added.

Noble and the provincial police director, Senior Superintendent Francisco Don Montenegro, said police have not determined the cause of the explosion.

But Senior Superintendent Nilo Anso, the city police chief, told The Associated Press by telephone that a bomb appeared to have triggered the blast that gutted the vehicle, although investigators have yet to determine the type of explosive used.

Police and Topacio said they had no immediate suspects, but the governor is known to have a number of enemies.

## 4 US Marines charged with rape to appear in court

**MANILA, Philippines (AP)**—A Filipino woman allegedly raped by four U.S. Marines last year was expected to face the servicemen for the first time in court Friday.

Evalyn Ursua, a lawyer for the 22-year-old woman who was not identified, said prosecutors were set to present two witnesses to corroborate the woman's claim that she was raped in a van by one of the Marines as the others cheered him on.

Ursua said the woman—referred to only as "Nicole"—will be present at the Makati Regional Trial Court in what would be her first encounter with the Marines since the alleged rape occurred in November.

Lawyers for the American defendants earlier said their clients also would be present in court Friday as well for the rest of the marathon hearings scheduled four times a week.

The rape charges against the

four are punishable by up to 40 years in jail. The Marines have refused to answer the charges, prompting the judge to enter a not guilty plea for them.

They are Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith, Lance Cpl. Keith Silkwood, Lance Cpl. Dominic Duplantis and Staff Sgt. Chad Carpentier, members of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Force stationed on the southern Japanese island of Okinawa.

They had finished counterter-

rorism maneuvers with Filipino troops when the alleged rape occurred in a van at the former U.S. Subic Bay Naval base near Olongapo city, west of Manila.

The U.S. Embassy has refused to turn them over to Philippine police, citing a provision under the Visiting Forces Agreement that lets U.S. authorities hold American servicemen facing a criminal case.

U.S. officials have refused to disclose their hometowns.

## RP government vows to arrest perpetrators of string of killings

**MANILA, Philippines (AP)**—The Philippine government, under pressure from human rights groups and critics, promised Thursday to take action against perpetrators behind a string of killings of left-wing activists and journalists.

Amnesty International urged President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo early this week to disband and bring to justice any group found responsible for the killings of hundreds of people since 2001. It also asked her to make it clear to all, including the military and police, that involvement in killings will not be tolerated.

"Those who perpetrated these senseless killings will not go far," presidential spokesman Ignacio Bunye said in a statement. "The law enforcement authorities are on their tracks and we need the cooperation and support of all concerned sectors to get them."

Bunye said Arroyo has created a police task force to coordinate investigations and submit a regular progress report but did not give any timetable.

At the same time, he defended the government's human rights record, saying it stands for democracy, human rights and criminal justice. An atmosphere of political freedom and untrammelled media can be seen and felt by all, he insisted.

The local human rights group Karapatan said as of last week, 73 activists and their supporters have been killed by suspected government forces or their agents so far this year, and 172 people died in 2005. A total of 152 others have been abducted and remain missing since 2001, while 607 have been killed over the same period.

## Official: al-Qaida group in RP still plots attacks despite leader's arrest

By **JIM GOMEZ**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

**MANILA, Philippines (AP)**—The U.S. government on Wednesday gave a US\$500,000 (€393,000) reward to two Filipinos for their help in capturing a key terror suspect whose group has been implicated in a deadly ferry bombing and a plot to bomb the American Embassy.

A Philippine counterterrorism official, Ric Blancaflor, said the suspect, Hilarion del Rosario Santos III, may have already been replaced as the head of the Rajah Solaiman Movement, a group of Christian converts to Islam that has been closely associated with al-Qaida-linked militants.

He said, without elaborating, that the group continued to plot attacks.

Santos was arrested in southern Zamboanga city in October

with six other suspected militants based on a tip provided by two Filipinos.

Wearing dark glasses, face masks and baseball caps to hide their identities, the two received the cash reward, which was split and packed in two cases, from U.S. officials led by Ambassador Kristie Kenney. They immediately walked out of a room at the embassy as U.S. and Philippine security officials applauded.

"We are gathered to honor two very brave patriots ... who came forward with actions and information that led to the arrest of a vicious terrorist," Kenney said. "They are ordinary people, living ordinary lives, who had the bravery and courage to stand up and say that terrorists will never be accepted."

The reward comes from the U.S. State Department's "Rewards for Justice" program, which provides cash for infor-

mation leading to the arrests of terrorists involved in attacks on Americans.

Kenney said the program was an effective weapon against terrorists, but added they continued to find ways to launch attacks.


"Their goal is to destroy, and so they constantly seek to stay a step ahead of us in doing that. What we're doing here is trying very hard not to let them get a step ahead," Kenney told a news conference.

A U.S. Embassy statement said the group, founded by Santos in January 2002, is believed to have links to Indonesian-based Jemaah Islamiyah and the Abu Sayyaf, a small but violent al-Qaida-allied group based in the southern Philippines.


Members of the Rajah Solaiman Movement have been implicated in the February 2004 bombing in Manila Bay of a popular ferry that killed 116 people—the second-worst terrorist attack in Asia after the 2002 nightclub bombings in Bali, Indonesia, killed 202 people, the embassy said.

### Rewards For Justice


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TERRORISTS  
and  
MURDERERS**



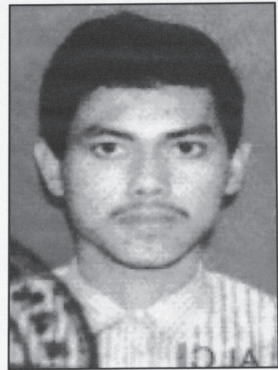
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(aka Abu Solaiman)  
**Up To  
P250,000,000**




Khadaffy Janjalani  
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**Up To  
P250,000,000**



Umar Patek  
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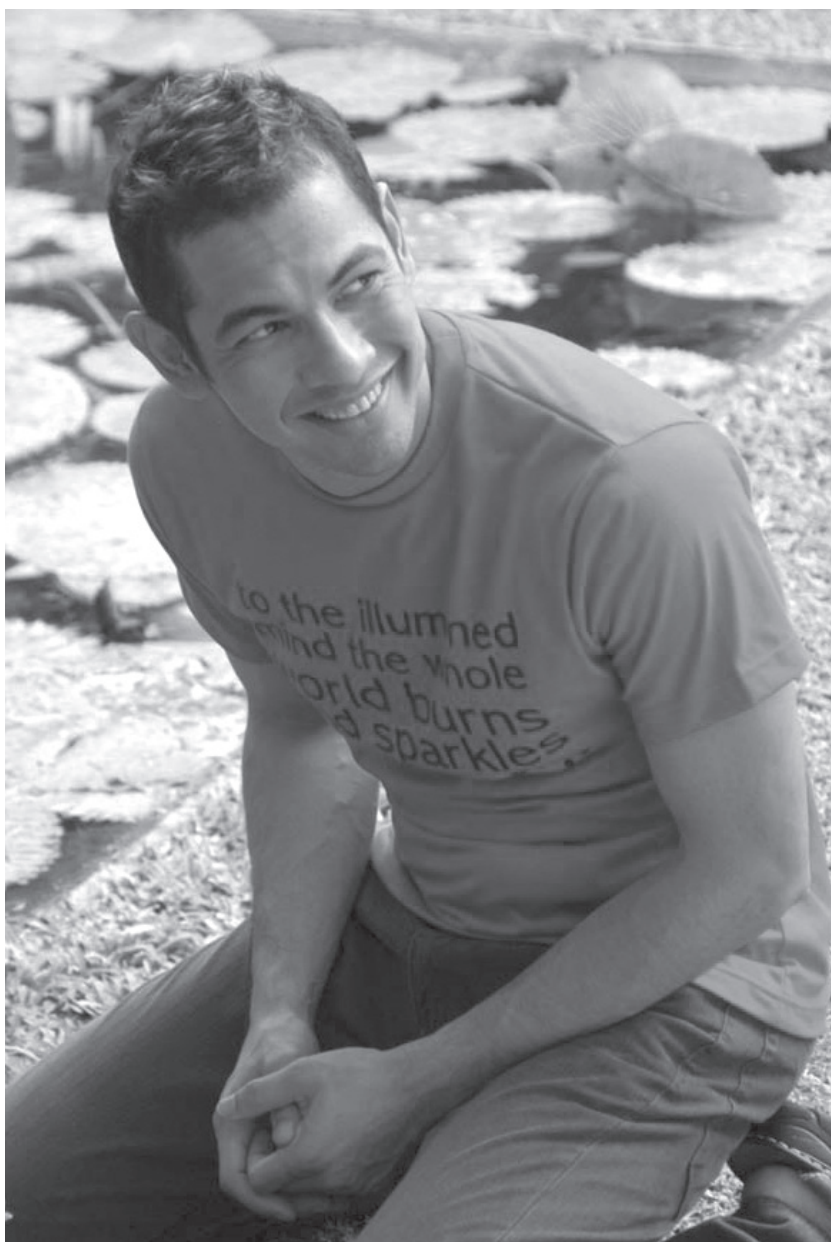
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117, (02) 928-5778, or 09214852512 (also for text messages);  
and the U.S. Embassy at (02) 526-9832/33, 1-800-10-739-2737.**

In this undated poster released by Philippine National Police and the US Rewards For Justice Program on Wednesday May 31, 2006, shows two of the most wanted Indonesian terror suspects Dulmatin, center, and Umar Patek, bottom left, who allegedly fled to the Abu Sayyaf stronghold in southern Philippines with the help of the Malaysian militant group Darul Islam. Malaysian police said Thursday June 1, 2006, the Darul Islam has been crippled following the arrests of 12 alleged Darul Islam terror suspects in Sabah, Malaysia between March 16 and April 3, 2006. Washington has offered up to US \$10-million dollars to Dulmatin's capture and up to US \$1-million dollars for Umar Patek, key suspects in the 2002 nightclub bombings in Bali, Indonesia that killed 202 people. Other alleged terror suspects are Jainal Antel Sali Jr., top left, Khadaffy Janjalani, and Isnilon Hapilon, who each carried up to US \$5-million dollars reward.



# PINOYSTYLE



**To the media, Gary has always been a good and pleasant interviewee. Hardly ever missing a beat, Gary can talk through any subject, his favorites being music and Jesus Christ.**

## 'Gay na ba kayo?'

By **DOLLY ANNE CARVAJAL**  
INQUIRER

As a mom (but not a stage mother), I am more than proud that my gay son IC is in the cast of "Manay Po." What better vehicle could there be for his "comeback" than a movie that's all about the joys and woes of being homosexual?

The story centers on a mother's (Cherry Pie Picache) acceptance of her three gay sons.

"Mother, gay I?"

IC won a Best Child Actor award many years ago. Now, he's no longer a child and has turned into an "actress!" I asked his co-stars John Prats, Polo Ravales and Jiro Manio (who all play bading in the film) what they would be like if they were gay in real life.

John said, "I won't cross-dress but I'll wear a little make-up. I want to be the girl in the relationship, who's pampered and all."

Polo replied, "I want my papa to be faithful. I'll make sure I'm a decent and respectable gay."

Jiro confessed, "I'll be the kikay type who dresses up like a real woman from head to foot."

Gay na ba kayo for "Manay Po" tomorrow?

### Emotionally challenging

After the success of "Darna," GMA Network is bound to continue conquering the hearts of the viewers in the first-ever TV

series about the well-loved Pinoy superhero, Captain Barbell. It has a modern and futuristic plot and setting.

It is top-billed by Richard Gutierrez, who plays the dual role of the mighty Captain Barbell and his alter ego Teng. Richard says his role in "Sugo" was physically demanding but Captain Barbell is emotionally challenging.

"As Teng and Captain Barbell, I'm required to show an extreme range of emotions—from a softie to a toughie." And who is his true-to-life hero?

"My dad and mom—'cause their support makes the impossible possible for me," Richard says.

Captain Barbell is out to proclaim that every good-hearted Pinoy (just like Richard's folks) is worthy of hero worship.

### Still groping

I egged Toni Gonzaga to let me in on the latest between Sam Milby and her. She smiled and said, "There are days when both of us are very talkative and times when we're both quiet. We're still groping, but also enjoying. I keep telling Sam just to go with the flow. He's the type who won't text if I don't text first. Nakikiramdam siya. Unlike most Amboys, he's not the aggressive type—which is fine with me."

So what's keeping them from taking their relationship to the next level? Toni said, "I know a lot of girls wanna be Sam's girl. He's definitely boyfriend material but I wanna take it slow."

Slow slow slow but it's a go go go....

## Gary V's 'Relevance'

By **NINI VALERA**  
INQUIRER

How does Gary Valenciano stay relevant 23 years after he hit the concert stage and created monster hits?

Twink Lagdameo, MTV Philippines director for talent/artist relations, credits Gary V's "creativity, dedication and passion for music."

Lagdameo explained: "It's all the things that he does, taken together, that make him unique. There's also his desire to constantly create something new, something totally different."

To his generation, Gary V has become an icon. To this generation's children, who are in the process of discovering him, Gary V is an awesome pop persona. To the latter group belongs Gary's son Gab, 17.

"My Dad's heart is with the youth," Gab said. "The reason he continues to be relevant is that people are like, 'I wanna do what he does, accomplish what he's done. I wanna be as great as

## ABS-CBN 'serious' about Code of Ethics

By **BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.**  
INQUIRER

ABS-CBN says it is determined to make its News and Current Affairs personnel adhere to its 164-page Standards and Ethics Manual.

The network reports that anchors of the network's prime time news show, "TV Patrol World," which is being re-launched on June 5, have not been treated with kid gloves in the matter of compliance.

Karen Davila was recently suspended for five days—without pay—because of a glossy magazine layout that was deemed an advertisement for a skin care line.

Ted Failon said he had to give up lucrative endorsement deals.

New recruit Kim Atienza, son of Manila Mayor Lito, was asked to "publicly renounce politics" prior to taking over the slot of the late Ernie Baron as weatherman-trivia expert on "TV Patrol World."

### Litmus test

Julius Babao's case proved to be the first litmus test—after Malacañang accused him of posting bail for terror suspect Dawud Santos late last year.

"I trusted [that] management would handle the investigation professionally," Babao said. Results of the network probe disputed the charges.

It was under Ressa, who became senior vice president and head of N&CA last year, that the manual was implemented.

She explained: "We want to go back to the spirit of the law. Our goal is to do the right thing all the time." She cited Davila's case as an example.

Davila recalled: "I was the one who showed Maria the magazine... because I didn't want it to set a bad

he is.' He's a good role model—as an artist-performer as well as a person."

To the audience who watched Gary perform live on Friday at an SM theater to launch his latest album aptly titled "Relevance," the singer is as much of a friend as he is an idol.

Hours after the show ended, Gary was still signing autographs and chatting with his fans. He went as far as setting a date with some of them for merienda.

To the media, Gary has always been a good and pleasant interviewee. Hardly ever missing a beat, Gary can talk through any subject, his favorites being music and Jesus Christ.

"This album took me four years to finish," he confided. "I got delayed by so many things—touring, producing, 'ASAP' [on ABS-CBN]. For a while, I also lost my songwriting skills. I don't know why. But it did come back, so here's the album."

One of the two songs he wrote for "Relevance" is the saddest song he has ever written, according to Gary. The

song is "Even for a While."

"It has words like, 'Why do hearts feel the way they do. Why does mine want to say I love you 'till the end of time, 'till I lose my mind, 'till it's over?' I started writing this in the 1980s, but finished it only in the '90s. People ask why I wrote it. I tell them, 'I don't know, I just did.'"

Though sad and unbecoming of the Gary's joyful character, the song shows not a dark side but rather a sensitive heart that knows what it's like to be broken. He admitted, "It was inspired by people I know."

### A kind of hush

Popular young singers are still invariably awed by Gary's presence.

Lagdameo recalled: "We were at [this event] once. Some bands were performing and people were not really listening; they were talking. Then Gary came on stage and they all shut up, and then wow! There's this level of attention that Gary commands, which all other artists want to reach."

## Network war on...Everest

By **BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.**  
INQUIRER

The network war has reached the summit—of Everest, no less.

On March 13, GMA 7 wrote a letter to ABS-CBN, "to inform your station that GMA Network Inc. holds the exclusive TV coverage rights to the Mt. Everest bid of Mr. Romeo Garduce."

Inquirer Entertainment obtained a copy of the letter, addressed to Charo Santos, executive vice president and channel head, and Maria Ressa, senior vice president and head of News and Current Affairs.

In the same letter, Dick Perez, GMA 7's vice president for Legal Affairs, reiterated: "GMA's exclusive rights include all events related to his summit bid. We advise your station to respect GMA 7's exclusive rights to Mr. Garduce's Mt. Everest summit bid."

Ressa confirmed she had received said letter. "I forwarded it to our lawyers. Our legal department gave me a position, but never sent a reply to GMA 7," she told Inquirer.

### National interest

In a nutshell, ABS-CBN's stand is that "the network would cover [Garduce on Everest] because it's a matter of national interest."

GMA 7 pointed out that "cease and desist" letters were routinely

exchanged between the two rival networks.

In an official statement, Butch S. Raquel, head of GMA 7's Corporate Communications, said, "Issuance of such notices is a common practice in the broadcast industry."

Ressa clarified: "It's common practice in entertainment. Both GMA and ABS-CBN have done exclusive coverages of [celebrity] weddings, for example. However, we in ABS-CBN N&CA, as far as I know, have never done that—certainly, not while I've been head of News."

Raquel asserted that since the First Philippine Mount Everest Expedition team has ABS-CBN as broadcast partner, "covering (them) was not without complications for GMA 7."

He continued: "There were occasions when the GMA 7 Everest team at Base Camp was restricted from covering ABS-CBN expedition team members. The same thing happened several times in the Philippines. Still, GMA News tried its best to give a balanced coverage."

Ressa reiterated: [Boxing champ] Manny Pacquiao has been interviewed by the competition, even though ABS-CBN is the media partner for his July fight. Same with the FPMEE climbers. My point is, we shouldn't set boundaries around news events. We [should] compete based on skills of journalism. In the end, the public benefits."

precedent. A sense of professionalism and transparency now prevails in the newsroom."

Failon admitted, "I've lost millions in potential product endorsements but I understood that it was for our own good."

"We want to avoid conflicts of interest and protect our personnel," Ressa said.

"I used to endorse a liquor compa-

ny," Failon recounted. "Then I realized I couldn't report about drunken policemen who fire guns indiscriminately if I continued to pitch for brandy."

Failon hastened to add, however, that he was not criticizing rival station GMA 7, which doesn't have a policy against endorsement deals.

"That's their call. I'm just proud to be in a team that stands firm on the issue," Failon said.



## Seafront malling

By **LINDA BOLIDO**  
INQUIRER

The SM chain is finally thinking out of the box—literally.

Those who expected the new and huge SM Mall of Asia to be just another version—only way bigger—of the chain's "architectural uniform" of box-like structures will be pleasantly surprised to see graceful curves and a variety of geometrical shapes.

Best of all, it offers more than just the pleasures of shopping, dining and recreational pursuits. The mall sits on reclaimed land overlooking the Manila Bay, and a visitor who shows up at the right time will be rewarded with a ringside view of the famed Manila Bay sunset. For that alone, a visit to the SM Mall of Asia should be on everyone's calendar.

In fact, this closeness to the bay sets the rules for the new mall's look. Curvilinear planes look like sails or wings or waves, depending on one's point of view. The motif of sand, sea and sun is very apparent in the SM department store that features sailboats and surfboards and marine life (including an "aquarium") to showcase the products in its various departments.

Dining establishments that paid for the privilege of giving their guests the spectacular sunset view have also gotten on the "3S" ship, using colors and décor evocative of the sea.

### Firsts

But, of course, to live up to its name, SM has to have more than just the natural wonder that is the Manila Bay sunset. The 386,000 sq m of floor space holds a couple of firsts: the Imax theater with an eight-story screen and the only Olympic-size skating rink.

The SM Prime Holdings, Inc.'s 25th supermall, and its most ambitious project to date, carries over 600 local and international brands and has more than 150 indoor and al fresco dining outlets.

The complex consists of four buildings linked by elevated walkways.

The north side is anchored by the Hypermarket while the south side is anchored by the department store. Both sides have four-level parking buildings.

The middle part has the main mall in front, with tenant establishments and eating places. It features outdoor dining balconies and landscaped terraces. At the back is the Entertainment Center building with cinemas, including the exclusive Director's Club, a venue for special screenings; and an auditorium for concerts and other activities.

A tram goes around the complex to ferry shoppers from the south to the north wing or vice versa. Inside, though going around the mall may still prove a little physically exhausting because of the place's sheer size, the walk is made more pleasant by landscaped pedestrian walkways.

The SM Mall of Asia is the third largest in the world after shopping centers in Alberta, Canada, and Beijing, China.

# RP-born actress in 'X-Men' has big role in HK film

By **RUBEN V. NEPALES**  
INQUIRER

**LOS ANGELES**—Philippine-born Mei Melancon is "a little disappointed" that, despite her two months of work on "X-Men: The Last Stand," she appears only for a few seconds in the movie which earned over \$120 million and toppled all box-office records last Memorial Day weekend in the US.

As we wrote several columns ago, "X-Men" director Brett Ratner had these words to say about Mei, who portrays Psylocke, when we interviewed him in New York: "I first cast Mei in 'Rush Hour.' Mei is a beautiful girl and a talented actress."

It's unfortunate though that if you blink, you'll miss her. She is the Asian-looking character with purple streaks in her hair who appears in a scene toward the film's end.

Saying she's "just happy to be part of the project," Mei has moved on—in fact to bigger things. She landed her first starring role in "Irreversi," a film being shot in Hong Kong.

"My real full name is Meiling Melancon but I prefer to be called Mei," she told me via e-mail from Cebu, where she is visiting for the first time.

Mei, 26, explained her connection to the Philippines and shared her experience working with the great British actor, Sir Ian McKellen, in "X-Men," among other topics.

**Brett Ratner speaks highly of you. How is your working relationship with him since he first cast you in "Rush Hour 2"?**

He is fun to work with. I have learned a lot, working with him. He has been like a mentor to me, someone I can call for advice. I read for "X-Men" and he called me. He said I also had to be approved by 20th Century Fox and Marvel Comics, so it was a long process.

**What was it like being on the set with this highly esteemed Ian McKellen?**

I was not that nervous in the scene with Ian since it was pretty straightforward. Ian is a legend and someone whose acting talent I have always respected. He is so kind and humble. I actually got to go with him and a group to the Rolling Stones concert in Seattle (we were shooting in Vancouver). I have been working on a one-woman play. Since Ian has done one-man plays, he was very generous in letting me pick his brain about this theater form.

**What were some of the highlights of your work on "The Last Stand"?**

Just being part of such a big production, watching other actors on the set and working as a team with great actors like Ian, Shohreh Aghdashloo and Michael Murphy were definitely highlights for me.

While Psylocke is a very small role, "X-Men" fans, especially Filipinos and Filipino-Americans, greeted your casting announcement as Psylocke with excitement.

I was happy that people were as excited as I was when I found out that I was going to play Psylocke. I was in Vancouver working on the movie for about two months and we shot a lot of scenes. So I was actually a little disappointed when I got to the premiere and I didn't see all the work up there in the final product. But it was a great learning experience for me.

Each of the characters in the "X-Men" comics universe has interesting powers and back stories

that can inspire a spin-off movie. What are the powers of Psylocke?

There are talks of a spin-off movie, but at this point I am not sure if I would be in it. Psylocke has psychic darts and the ability to move through shadows, which you see only for a second in "X-Men."

Tell me about the movie you are currently filming in Hong Kong.

I am doing a thriller called "Irreversi," which is set in present-day Hong Kong. In the movie, my older brother dies in a tragic skydiving accident and I become close to his business partner, whom I end up marrying. But nothing is as it seems. What attracted me to the part was that I got to play a normal girl named Lynda Wee—meaning I am not doing kung fu and I am not "bad"—who

**My real full name is Meiling Melancon but I prefer to be called Mei.**



cause every career is challenging. Every project that I have worked on so far has been pretty unforgettable.

**Were you both a print and ramp model?**

Yes, mainly print. It was a great way to support myself while following my dream. But it wasn't something I aspired for. It just happened.

You were born in the Philippines but you are not part-Filipino?

I was born in a hospital in Metro Manila. My mom Denise is French-American. People used to call her Elizabeth Rose. She had been living in the Philippines for five years when she met my biological father, a Chinese-Japanese, who was here on business. I do believe that I have family here but, in all honesty, I have no contact with my father so I am not sure. My mom remarried when I was pretty young.

**Do you speak Tagalog?**

My mom spoke Tagalog and taught me a couple of songs in Tagalog when I was little. This is actually the first time I've been here in 20 years so it is really cool. My brother Nathaniel was also born here.

**At what age did you and your family leave the Philippines for Japan?**

My parents traveled a lot doing volunteer work. My dad also held various translating jobs. I was 2 or 3 when I left the Philippines. My older sister Anaik, my brother Nathaniel and I are close in age so we were always chatting about where we were going. So I remember every step—getting to Hong Kong and, finally, Japan and thinking how different it was to be in this high-rise building instead of running around in the lush gardens and eating papaya. I had a really nice nanny here in the Philippines whom we missed when we left. I don't remember her name, though. I would have to ask my mom.

What was it like to grow up in Japan? And please share about this children's performance group that you traveled with all over Asia.

I really enjoyed growing up and traveling in Asia. We were either home-schooled/tutored or we would go to International Schools. I have played guitar since I was about 5. My mom is a singer and guitar player. About eight of us kids would put on productions of stories like "The Little Match Girl" and other plays and sing songs at different events. We also performed for convalescent homes, orphanages and senior citizen homes. I was pretty shy but for some reason, when I performed, I could do anything I felt like doing.

**How and where did you learn Wushu Kung Fu?**

I started training for Wushu Kung Fu about four years ago. I studied with different teachers in the Los Angeles area who each taught me something valuable.

**What's next for you?**

I have a couple of things that I am looking at but I will have to see what happens when I get back to the States. Do you have any suggestions? Thanks for this great time.

□ □ □

As you know, the media is being kept at bay from Brangelina and their newborn in Namibia.

So this brief announcement in *New York Times* made me laugh like a Namibian hyena on board a plane last weekend: "Mother and daughter were said to be doing well. The paparazzi are still expecting."

**What are the challenges and heartaches of being a rising actress in Hollywood?**

The hardest thing for me is when you pour your heart and soul into something and then you are not able to see the fruits of it. It is hard for everyone but when I decided that I was going to do this, I don't want to waste any energy on why it is too difficult be-



**PINOY KASI****Brain gain**By **MICHAEL L. TAN**  
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

**T**he United States' new immigration law has been in the headlines lately, with even stricter conditions now for people wanting to work there—unless you're a nurse. The new law actually lifts current quotas on the number of foreign nurses that can enter the United States.

The nursing export industry is elated, but there's also alarm and apprehension coming from the Department of Health, the hospitals and many others who see a greater health crisis ahead as we lose more nurses and doctors-turned-nurses.

As we desperately look for ways to stem this brain drain, we might be forgetting to address a more basic question that has plagued us since we first began exporting nurses, back in the 1950s: Just how do we look at our human resources for health?

**Frontline workers**

Through all these years, we've invested so much for the development of doctors and nurses, with the assumption that they would be the ones to move the health care system forward. For the most part, we've done quite well with this aspect of health resource development in the sense that we train them so well that they're exportable to the most developed countries of the world.

They're exportable because we train them mainly to work in the West. These doctors and nurses will have no problems handling the most complicated surgical procedures, and describing the various health problems of affluent countries, but would be at loss convincing an elderly Filipino patient she has a cataract, rather than "pasma sa mata," or convincing a parent to use life-saving oral rehydration solution for diarrhea.

As we fret now about the impact of the exodus of doctors and nurses, we're forgetting that the health care system can still move forward, maybe even improve, if we would just give more attention to our midwives and community health workers. They are the ones who man (or rather, woman) the front lines in our battle against our many health problems. Even more importantly, many have no intentions of migrating.

Many of the achievements of our health system in the last few decades would not have been possible without these frontline workers. To give just one important example, infant and child death rates have dropped dramatically in the past 50 years or so, plummeting from something like 15 percent of all births to about 5 percent now. This was achieved mainly through a package of interventions that Unicef called GOBI-FF: growth charts to detect malnutrition among children, oral rehydration drinks for diarrhea, breastfeeding,

immunization, food programs and family planning.

It was the midwives and village health workers who delivered the GOBI-FF packages throughout the country, to the most remote villages. They still do that today, while handling many other responsibilities, including delivering babies, conducting health education, checking households for every kind of problem imaginable, from the lack of toilets to domestic violence.

While doctors and nurses complain about night shifts, the midwives and village health workers are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Doctors and nurses grumble about heavy patient loads in hospitals. Our midwives and community health workers are responsible for literally hundreds and thousands of people, sometimes as a one-woman team.

Doctors and nurses whine about working conditions in hospitals and lack of equipment. Midwives and community health

**While doctors and nurses complain about night shifts, the midwives and village health workers are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Doctors and nurses grumble about heavy patient loads in hospitals. Our midwives and community health workers are responsible for literally hundreds and thousands of people, sometimes as a one-woman team.**

workers often have no equipment at all, no transport except their feet, and they work under the most difficult of conditions. A few months back, I featured in this column a story told by former secretary of health Dr. Alfredo Bengzon about how he had met a midwife who was working even as she was recovering from bullet wounds sustained during an encounter between government troops and rebels. A few months later, he learned that same midwife had drowned while trying to deliver vaccines during a storm.

How do we compensate our midwives and community health workers? Government midwives barely get the minimum wage, if they get anything at all (there are municipalities that can't even afford to pay them). And the community health workers? Some get a token stipend; others work voluntarily.

**Upgrading**

I've always had a special affection for midwives and village health workers because I worked with them in community-based health programs for many years. Besides their commitment, what's been so impressive has been their eagerness to learn and the speed with which they do pick up. I've had community health workers who had barely finished grade school and would sit through training sessions without taking notes and yet excelled at their work.

There's so much they can learn to do, yet our laws still forbid them from handling many important procedures. For example, community health workers are, technically, still not allowed to give injections or to stitch a wound.

Amid the brain drain, we forget the potentials of "brain gain" in terms of the health personnel who have stayed. Don't think that they do this because they have no choice; there is a growing overseas demand for midwives. In fact, with their two-year training, the midwives have an edge over those who have taken only a six-month caregiver course.

Solving the nursing brain drain requires a look at the big picture, trying to work out a better fit between our needs and the development of human resources. I've wondered, for example, if those short caregiver courses are deemed adequate for a Filipino to go off and care for other nations' children and elderly, then an upgraded two-year midwifery course would work wonders. With a little more focused training, midwives should be certified as paramedics or practical nurses.

Our village health workers at present go through quick training, sometimes as short as a week of lectures, and yet they become quite effective. Why then can't we develop a longer course that will upgrade their skills so that they can become health aides? Maybe the best village health workers can be given scholarships for a six-month course appropriate to the Philippines. Some of the six-month caregiver courses include such lifesaving skills as basic French, choosing a good wine and, lately, eating without a spoon. We could replace them with training for communications and health education. So many of our problems are rooted in low health literacy so good health communicators will work wonders.

I am not saying we should just let our doctors and nurses leave. We need to rethink our curriculum and training in medical and nursing schools. But even as we do that, we should be looking for ways to maximize the contributions of our front-line workers, the ones who intend to stay.

Think about it: Upgraded village health workers and midwives would mean more health problems handled at the household and community levels. We save more lives, and relieve pressures on the hospitals, so doctors and nurses can do what they're best trained for—right here in the Philippines.

**License to murder**

**I**n a more emphatic intervention on the spiral of killing of leftwing activists and journalists, Amnesty International on Tuesday called on the government of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to make an unequivocal "public statement to make it crystal clear" to all security forces, including the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, "that involvement in such killings will not be tolerated and that she will do everything in her power to combat impunity."

The statement is stronger than last week's statement of AI and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) condemning the rising violence of human rights and holding the government responsible for a "pattern" or "climate of impunity shielding the perpetrators of such killings" for which paramilitary death squads are the primary suspects.

AI this time urged the President to disband any group found responsible for the murders. And the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines added its voice to the effort to influence the government to take the steps necessary to stop the wave of violence.

Although AI, the CHR and the bishops have not presented evidence directly linking security forces or any group associated with government to the killings that have made the Philippines the focus of international attention for human rights abuses during the past five years -- and on a scale unprecedented since the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship -- these groups hammered on the "climate of impunity" that emboldens assassins to go on a rampage

without fear of retribution or punishment. The bishops said, "It is not right that people be killed on the basis of their political views," calling attention to the fact that the killings have victimized members of the legal Left and journalists.

This chorus of condemnations underscores the emergence of human rights abuses and political repression as the paramount issue confronting the Arroyo administration, pushing aside momentarily the issue of the alleged rigging of the 2004 election results stemming from the Garcillano tapes.

Human rights violations, more frightening because the issue involves more killings than disappearances and abduction of political activists, have become a galvanizing issue around which the Catholic Church, human rights groups, the Left and even international watchdog groups on human rights have found a common reason for denouncing the administration.

The issue has more political resonance at present than the tapes issue that has eroded the legitimacy of the Arroyo presidency. It is an issue on which the Catholic bishops speak as one voice and are not divided, like they are over whether or not to call for the resignation of President Arroyo. The resonance of the human rights abuses issue across a broad sector, including political parties, church groups and NGOs, should be of concern to

the administration, which cannot remain callous to calls for a stop to the killings without further undermining public trust and confidence in its performance.

Administration defenders are skirting the issue when they demanded that AI should reveal the sources of reports it had received that paramilitary groups with ties to some military officers were behind the killings. They have challenged AI to produce evidence that the administration had instigated the killings. But disclosure by AI of the sources of its reports can only open another round of reprisals against such sources of information.

The issue is embodied in the key phrase, "climate of impunity," which is an indictment of the failure of the government to use the police powers at its command to stop criminal acts,

including making arrests and haling suspects to the courts and before prosecution services, regardless of the "political color" of the victims.

The proof of the existence of a "climate of impunity" is clear for all to see. It includes (1) the "color coding" of the victims of assassinations, (2) the hibernation of the inquiry of Task Force Usig of the Philippine National Police (PNP), which had been ordered by the President to inquire into claims of the PNP, military authorities and the Department of Justice that internal purges

in the Communist Party were the reason for the killings, (3) the statements of some military and police officers that the killings were "cyclical" resulting from "ups and downs" of the crime wave, and (4) statements of senior military officers, with documented records of human rights abuses in their former areas of assignment, that the anti-subversion act legalizing the Communist Party of the Philippines be repealed.

The mission assigned to Task Force Usig is indicative of a "climate of impunity." Its framework limits the inquiry to the issue of the alleged involvement of security forces with death squads. The framework and terms of reference are a recipe for a whitewash and cover-up. It is not an independent inquiry. The President has directed the PNP to clean up its own ranks. The public perception of this framework is that the President is not earnest in stopping the killings, and has given the security forces the tools and the guidelines to clear their own people as well as to validate their theory that the communists were responsible for butchering their comrades.

There has been cynical comment from military and police authorities suggesting that it was not a bad thing at all that the communists were exterminating themselves, thereby sparing the government the grisly task of killing them and allowing the communists to weaken their own movement.

This set of circumstances defines a "climate of impunity" that is sending an unmistakable signal to those behind the killings that they have a license to continue the murders.

**Analysis**By **AMANDO DORONILA**  
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER



# SAMU'T SARI

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



## RP-NMI FRIENDSHIP WEEK

Officers of the different Filipino organizations in the Commonwealth pose for a souvenir shot with, seated from left, Philippine Consul General Wilfredo Maximo, Saipan Mayor Juan B. Tudela, acting Gov. Timothy Villagomez, and Attorney General Matthew Gregory, soon after the acting governor signed the proclamation declaring the CNMI-Philippine Friendship Week yesterday at the Office of the Governor on Capitol Hill. The proclamation signing is part of events lined up for the upcoming Independence Day of the Philippines on June 12.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



## ISLAND CLEANUP

POWER, Inc conducted an island cleanup last Sunday, May 28, 2006, from the area of 13 Fishermen to the Quartermaster Road. They are shown here posing for a souvenir shot after finishing the activity. The cleanup was sponsored by the Saipan Chamber of Commerce.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## BARTENDING CHAMPS

Winners of the 8th annual Taste of the Marianas Bartenders' Cocktail Competition pose with sponsors and NMI Bartenders Association officers after the awarding of medals and certificates. From left are Lito Espino, Ramon Awit, liquor sales manager Sheila Peebles, contest winner Ray Macalintal of Fiesta Resort and Spa Saipan, Coca Cola sales marketing director Kathryn Barry, 2nd runner up Ernie Garcia of Hyatt Regency Saipan, Best in Showmanship awardee Lorenzo Divino of Hotel Nikko, Best in Costume winner Day-Ann de Leon of Aqua Resort Club, and 1st runner up and Best in Taste awardee Mauro Boy Sabate of Fiesta Resort and Spa Saipan.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## GET-TOGETHER

Members of the Susupe cell group of the Saipan Community Church vespers congregation get together in Susupe last Friday to celebrate the graduation from high school of its three members—Ruby Ann Reyes, Maria Conui, and Valissa del Rosario. The three graduated with awards.

**Maharlika**  
PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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